

Leaday Townsite
Intersection of Farm Road 2134
and Old Ballinger Road
Voss Vicinity
Coleman County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3362

HABS
TEX
42-Voss.V,
11-

MEASURED DRAWINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
LEADAY TOWNSITE

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: Located at intersection of Farm/Ranch Road #2134 and the Day-Padgett Ranch Road (Old Ballinger Road), Leaday, Coleman County, State of Texas

USGS Leaday Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 14.436909.3492515

Date of Construction: 1904 (town staked out 19 December 1904)

Present Owner: Jo Zach Miller IV et al., heirs to the Day-Miller Ranch, trusteeship with Commerce State Bank of Kansas City; permanent easement granted in 1986 to Colorado River Municipal Water District, Big Spring, Texas

Present Use: Abandoned townsite

Significance: Located near the site of Trap Crossing, an old and much-traveled crossing of the Colorado River on the road from Coleman to Fort Concho, the Leaday townsite was laid out in 1904 by local rancher Mabel Doss Day Lea on her great Day Ranch lands in a period when she was planning a subdivision of the ranch into tenant farms. The town was intended to accommodate prospective homesteaders and to serve them once they settled in the vicinity. It satisfied these functions for a number of years until the failure of cotton markets and the impact of the Depression disintegrated the tenant policy. The townsite continued in the ownership of Mabel Day Lea's descendants and the descendants of the Miller family, purchasers of a portion of the Day Ranch. The town was never completed to the extent of its ambitious first plan, and it began to shrink after the first ten years of its life. It was much depleted by the 1950s and abandoned by the late 1980s. Nevertheless, the little town had a strong cultural impact on the surrounding countryside for two generations of farmers and ranchers.

Historian:

Gus Hamblett, Texas A&M University, September, 1989

II. HISTORY

A. AN OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

For the general historical overview which places the property in the context of the development of cattle ranching at the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers please see HABS No. TX-3350.

B. THE LEADAY SITE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Leaday townsite occupies land that had been set aside in the 1840s for the Brazoria and Fort Bend Counties' school revenues and was under the directorship of the school commissioners for those counties.¹ It was for many years populated only by roving Indian groups and occasionally an intrepid band of cattle drivers.

The first permanent settler in the vicinity was Rich Coffey who established himself in 1862 on upper Elm Creek between the present-day towns of Leaday and Voss. Coffey's place was called Flat Top Settlement, a group of rough cabins palisaded for defense against the Indians. In 1869 Coffey relocated to another site in the vicinity, this time at the confluence of the Concho and Colorado Rivers, where he established a second fortified compound and continued to run cattle; this new location was about two-and-one-half miles to the west of the future townsite. This second Coffey settlement became the family's permanent homestead and continued in the ownership of Coffey descendants until the late 1980s (HABS No. TX-3354).²

Other early settlers were William J. Hogue, who was situated west of Leaday; and James C. Swift, who located to the east on Elm Creek, on land which became known as Swift's Hole. Yet another early settler, Bill McAulay, settled on Grape Creek a little over a mile to the northwest of Leaday and in the mid-1870s built a small stone house which became the first headquarters of the Day Ranch. The McAulay structure still stands.³

These early pioneers established a convenient cattle crossing of the Colorado River immediately southwest of the future townsite. A store was established on a bluff on the Concho County side of the crossing called The Trap, and the place itself took on the name of Trap Crossing.⁴ A post office called "Rich Coffey, Texas" was located in the old Trap store. Another store, The Trigger, was located on the opposite bank of the river. Both the Trap and Triggers stores were washed away in the great flood of 1882. Although the crossing changed locations several times in the nineteenth century, the original Trap Crossing was located just to the west of the present-day Leaday Crossing (HAER No. TX-20), upriver from the existing house on the Gann Ranch (HABS No. TX-3358).

In 1878 ranching entrepreneur William H. Day purchased from the Fort Bend County and Brazoria County school commissioners a very large tract which included the site of Leaday, the future townsite lying on the far west boundary of the new Day Ranch, lands which spread to the north, east, and south for several thousand acres.⁵ In the early 1870s Day had traveled throughout the Texas livestock-raising regions to assess the post-Civil War status of the cattle industry. From this experience Day had concluded that the practice of open range grazing was no longer viable and that in the future ranchers would have to own their grazing lands, with clear title, and would be compelled to fence those lands.⁶ When he moved onto his new Coleman lands, Day made his headquarters at the McAulay stone house and immediately began fencing a 7500-acre portion of his land which became the locally famous Red Wire Pasture. This act precipitated wire-cutting and range wars for several years.⁷

William Day had married Mabel Doss in 1879, and the operation of the Day Ranch was their joint endeavor until his sudden death in 1881.⁸ (For a more comprehensive history of the Day Ranch and additional biographical information on William and Mabel Day see HABS No. TX-3351: Mabel Doss Day Lea House.) Mabel Doss Day was left with their infant child, Willie Mabel Day, and debts of over one hundred thousand dollars. She immediately began arrangements to refinance the Day Ranch and to consolidate the operations of the ranch, earning a reputation for intelligent management which gained her a great deal of celebrity, both locally and throughout the Texas cattle ranching area. Among other problems she encountered was the

great flood of 1882 and in 1883 the beginning of a fence-cutting war which destroyed many miles of wire along the Day Ranch borders.⁹ In the 1880s she began to formulate an elaborate plan for subdividing the ranch lands which eventually would be realized by her daughter and son-in-law, including negotiating, unsuccessfully, to persuade the Santa Fe Railroad to run a line through her ranch in the vicinity of the future Leaday townsite. In 1889 Mabel Day remarried; her second husband was Captain J. C. Lea of New Mexico, who had put together a large ranch in the Pecos Valley of New Mexico, a project as ambitious as the Coleman County projects of her first husband. She left a brother in charge of the Day Ranch and moved to New Mexico to the town of Roswell which had been built on Lea's ranch. Together she and Lea founded the present-day New Mexico Military Academy. The Lea Ranch and various Lea-related projects in New Mexico began to suffer setbacks in the 1890s, and when Lea died, his widow found herself once more in debt.¹⁰

C. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TOWN

Mabel Day Lea was determined to leave her daughter Willie Day debt-free. She returned to Texas to the Day Ranch in 1904 and continued her earlier scheme of subdivision, including the project which had been gradually germinating of a new town to be located on the ranch near the old Trap Crossing of the Colorado River. As a town-builder she was no doubt drawing on the experience gathered through assisting her second husband at his new town of Roswell. Among other efforts, Mabel Day Lea had herself appointed a commissioner of the St. Louis World's Fair where she promoted West Texas, and specifically Coleman County, as an ideal destination point for homesteaders. Willie Day married Tom Padgitt in 1904, and on December 19 of that year Mabel Day Lea and the Padgitts staked out the new town at its present location on high ground near Grape Creek, one mile east of Trap Crossing.¹¹ A post office was established and named "Leaday" in honor of Mabel Lea's two husbands. Advertisements were placed across the country to attract settlers; plans were made for various buildings at the townsite, and various tenant houses planned for the ranch subdivision (HABS No. TX-3363: Day-Padgitt Ranch Tenant House). Construction was begun on a new headquarters house for the Day Ranch (HABS No. TX-3351), interrupted by Mabel Day Lea's death in 1906. In 1907 Willie Day Padgitt and her husband sold a great

portion of the Day Ranch, including the Red Wire Pasture, to the Miller banking family of Belton.¹² The Millers followed the policy of subdivision established by Mabel Day Lea and continued by the Padgitts, and together the Padgitts and Millers proceeded with the development of the new town of Leaday. Under the new arrangement, the townsite lands were now held by both families: the eastern and southern portion owned by the Millers, adjacent to their newly-formed Day-Miller Ranch, and the western and northern portion by the Padgitts, bordering on their remaining lands, henceforth called the Day-Padgitt Ranch.

D. THE TOWN PLAN

The unsigned town plan was formally platted and the drawing filed at the Coleman County Courthouse, 14 March 1906.¹³ The drawing probably pre-dates the 1906 recordation; it may be based on an earlier drawing from 1904, the year Mabel Day Lea and the Padgitts staked out the town; or it may be based on a drawing of an even earlier date, as Mrs. Lea had been considering a scheme for a town on the ranch for some time before her return to the area.

Although never completed to the extent of the ambitious recorded drawing of the plan, the basic configuration of the planned town was carried out, and the general placement of its various elements remained faithful to the original plan. The Leaday plan was based on a strong north-south axis along its major street, Main Street, with cross-streets delineating rows of residential blocks. The southern end of Main Street was planned to connect with the old road over the Trap Crossing of the Colorado River. At this southern fringe of the town was a tract designated "Gin Lot," and directly to the west of the gin, bounded on the south by the river and on the west by Grape Creek, a large tract was set aside for an industrial college campus site, the surrounding grounds to be called "Chatauqua Park." On Main Street, a few blocks north of the river, a block was allotted for a school; and farther north on Main Street, lots set aside for a hotel, a bank, mercantile stores, and other structures.

The plan drawing described a town nine blocks wide and thirteen blocks long on the north-south axis, with wide areas for expansion to the north and east. Only a fraction of this area was ever developed. The college was never realized and most of the residential blocks remained undeveloped. The school was

constructed, and the northern end of Main Street developed somewhat with the construction of a church, a group of stores, a blacksmith shop, the hotel, and some residences.

E. CONSTRUCTION CHRONOLOGY

Building construction in Leaday was begun immediately on several structures, a two-story woodframe hotel being finished by May 1905. Mabel Day Lea also had constructed another hotel at the little nearby town of Voss. Both hotels were to provide accommodation for prospective homesteaders as they came to view the new tenant farmsteads opening up on the Day Ranch. The first Leaday mercantile store was built in 1905; soon there were three stores in the new town.¹⁴ As many as fifty houses were constructed, including a dugout on the west side of town. A non-denominational church, built to serve various religious groups, eventually attended mainly by Baptists, was constructed on the east side of Main Street and called Union Church.¹⁵ At the south end of Main Street, on the school grounds site allocated in the original town plan, a school was erected in 1906; a separate auditorium building was constructed about 1917.¹⁶ Other buildings in the first phase of construction were a post office; a blacksmith shop; a livery stable; and a Woodmen of the World hall.¹⁷ A cotton gin was constructed about two hundred yards south of the present-day Baptist Church; another gin was built by the Padgitts some distance south of Leaday on a bluff over the Colorado River.¹⁸ Excavations were made for a bank in these early years, but the structure was never completed.¹⁹

F. SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

In the first years of its development Leaday did a thriving local business, serving rural families who no longer had to make the arduous shopping trips to Coleman or Ballinger over roads which were still rough pasture trails. Soon Leaday had a population of over one hundred people, many of them engaged in town business activities; and many of these families remained in the area long after the town faded away, families such as Allen, Stephenson, Jamison, Walden, Hudson, Pyburn, and Padgitt.²⁰ The first Leaday store was constructed for a Mr. Moore; other merchants were a Mr. Faircloth, H. W. Wireman, Ike Stephenson.²¹ The stores did not stock building lumber, but did provide building supplies such as

nails and tar paper; other stock included barbed wire, farm supplies, hardware, fabric, food, clothing and shoes. The first postmaster was H. T. Crenshaw, who drove a one-seated hack daily from Leaday to the little railhead town of Valera to the northeast; he lived in a dugout on the west side of town.²² Later, the storekeeper Ike Stephenson, who also had a blacksmith shop, served as postmaster; and his son, James Stephenson, was the last Leaday postmaster.²³ Members of local families frequently served as teachers at Leaday School.

The local landlords, the Miller and Padgitt families, also played active community roles. One of the older vicinity residents recalled her first memory of a Leaday community gathering, a 1907 Christmas party at Leaday, given to the townspeople by the Padgitts. For the party a silver Christmas tree from Dallas was set up and gifts provided for all the children in the community, a custom continued for some years by both the Miller and Padgitt families.²⁴

After a decade, it had become apparent that the growth pattern had reached a peak; the plans for various elements set forth in the original town plat had to be abandoned. By 1916, in a special court order, the Padgitts and Millers requested to have much of the townsite lands redescribed as acreage for tax purposes; the request was granted, effectively revoking most of the townsite except lots along Main Street and around the little nucleus of the present-day cluster at the north end of town.²⁵ The remaining lands went back into the landholdings of the Day-Padgitt and Day-Miller Ranches.

When roads began to be paved after World War I and automobiles became more and more common, farmers began taking their cotton to be ginned in the bigger towns where there was a wider selection of mercantile goods and various diversions not available at Leaday. Business at the local Padgitt and Leaday gins began to decline; finally, the Leaday gin was destroyed by a tornado in 1928.²⁶ The tenant families had found subsistence farming extremely difficult on land more suitable for cattle grazing; droughts and bad cotton markets plagued the local economy; the Depression further depleted the hopes of these hard-working families. Although many of them stuck it out and moved from one tenant establishment to another in anticipation of better production, many of the families moved from the confluence area. Gradually, the tenant farms were repossessed and reintegrated into the Day-

Padgitt and Day-Miller Ranches.

The town continued to shrink. The Leaday hotel was dismantled in the 1920s and the lumber used by Tom Padgitt in the construction of tenant houses on the Day-Padgitt Ranch, but even these houses could not serve their function long and were moved by Padgitt to Coleman for a housing subdivision.²⁷ By the period 1920s-1930s, Leaday town activity centered around a couple of stores; church and school functions attracted crowds; and rodeos were put on periodically. But the town was definitely on the decline. At the end of World War II Leaday had a much reduced population; the church remained and a few stores. During the 1950s most of the houses were dismantled and very little left.²⁸ Eventually the old Union Church was taken down and the present-day Baptist Church constructed across Main Street from the old site. In the late 1980s only a few people occupied the town.

III. THE EXISTING TOWNSITE

A. DESCRIPTION

At the time the HABS measurements and photographic documentation survey was made in the summer and early fall of 1989, only a handful of structures still existed within the confines of the much-reduced townsite. These material remains essentially consisted of the excavation for the never-completed bank, the footings for the destroyed gin, the abandoned school auditorium, the later Baptist Church, and a cluster of four structures at the junction of Main Street with the old Ballinger Road: namely, a mercantile store, the livery stable, the last post office, and an early bungalow. They will be discussed in a sequence beginning with this last-mentioned group, the cluster at the northern end of Main Street.

Cluster: Store: A mercantile store is located on the southwest corner of the junction (HABS photo TX-3362-A-1). It is a one-story woodframe structure, approximately 30 feet wide and 80 feet long. Old flush-boarding exists under modern asbestos siding; a shed portion of the structure is covered in railroad siding; the gable and shed roofs are covered in corrugated metal sheets. The narrow front-gabled east elevation facing Main

Street is entered through double wood doors of the 5-stacked-panels type with a window to either side; there is no existing porch or canopy, but a break-line in the asbestos siding describes a gable for a porch roof which once butted this wall; there is a concrete slab porch floor. Windows are woodsash in the 2-over-2 pane pattern. The building is unoccupied; many of the windows and door openings are boarded up; the structure is in fair condition. This is the last of one of several such stores in Leaday; it was once operated by local resident James Stephenson's father, Ike Stephenson, who served for a time as postmaster and also operated a blacksmith shop across the street at the site of the present post office structure.²⁹

Livery Stable: A barn structure which once functioned as a livery stable is located across from the store on the northwest corner of the junction. It is a woodframe structure, approximately 24 by 30 feet (HABS photo TX-3362-B-1). Its pitched roof is covered in corrugated and standing-seam metal sheets; the siding is old patched board siding in various configurations. The building is in poor condition.

Post Office: The present post office structure is a modern structure located across the street from the store at the southeast corner of the junction. It is approximately 25 feet square (HABS photo TX-3362-C-1). It is a modern metal structure on a concrete slab; however, its recent canopy may be a re-use of parts from an earlier wood structure, and it shelters an old gasoline pump. It occupies the site of Ike Stephenson's blacksmith shop. Postal service was discontinued here in 1987.³⁰ The structure is unoccupied, in fair condition.

Bungalow: A house is located to the east of the post office, facing north on the old Ballinger Road. It is a one-story woodframe bungalow, probably constructed in the 1920s-1930s period (HABS photo TX-3362-D-1). In its original configuration it was approximately 25 feet wide and 60 feet deep, with a garage, 16 feet wide and 20 feet long, of more recent date, located to the rear of the lot. The house is covered in railroad

siding, and its front-gabled roof covered in asphalt shingles; the windows are woodsash of the one-over-one pane pattern; there are four wooden boxed columns to support the wide north porch. The plan is a typical bungalow plan of two parallel rows of rooms in a shotgun configuration with some recent alterations and additions to the rear. The house is presently occupied and in good condition. It is the last house in town but typical of a number of Leaday houses and houses on the surrounding small farms and ranches which once existed in the area until the 1950s.

Church: The present-day Baptist Church was located on the west side of Main Street, south of the cluster, on a lot across the street from the site of the original non-denominational Union Church. It is a one-story woodframe church structure, approximately 30 feet wide and 60 feet long. It is of relatively modern construction, a long gabled structure, the roof covered in asphalt shingles and the walls covered in asbestos siding; but it probably incorporates materials from the older church, for instance the woodsash windows, which are of the 2-over-2 pane pattern. In September, 1989, after the HABS documentation survey had been conducted at Leaday, the church was moved to higher ground outside the townsite boundaries.

School: The 1906 school classroom structure no longer exists but the 1917-period auditorium does; it is located on the southern fringe of the town and has been surveyed for HABS documentation as a separate site distinct from this Leaday Townsite documentation; see HABS No. TX-3353: Leaday School.

B. OWNERSHIP AND FUTURE

In 1979 the Texas Water Commission granted permission to the Colorado River Municipal Water District, an entity based in Big Spring, to construct a large dam on the Colorado River. The site chosen was a location several miles downstream from Leaday, sixteen miles below the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers. Early in the planning stages, a program was developed to

address environmental concerns, including the impact of the proposed flood area on prehistoric and historic cultural resources. In 1980-1981 a survey of historic cultural resources was conducted by Freeman and Freeman under contract to Espey, Huston and Associates, a firm of Austin environmental consultants. Subsequently a number of other studies and amplifications of previous studies have been conducted. In early 1988 an Albuquerque, New Mexico, firm of environmental scientists, Mariah Associates, Inc., began further assessment of the area of the flood plain, including various archaeological investigations and assessments. Mariah has also acted in the role of coordinator of related projects, including this project: the recordation of nineteen endangered historic sites in the confluence area for the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record. The sites were selected from a list compiled under the guidance of the Texas Historical Commission. Construction was finished on the dam in the late summer of 1989. Called the Stacy Dam and Reservoir, the project will inundate approximately 19,200 acres. Permanent easement was granted to the Colorado River Municipal Water District by the Miller heirs in 1986.³¹ In that year, as the Stacy Dam neared completion and inundation seemed possible, the post office was dismantled; and, as mentioned above, the Baptist Church structure was moved in September, 1989, to higher ground one mile to the east of the townsite.

IV. ENDNOTES

1. Donald R. Abbe and Joseph E. King, "A Preliminary Report: Historical Resources within the Stacy Dam Project Area," draft of a report prepared for the Colorado River Municipal Water District by Mariah Associates, Inc., Environmental consultants (Lubbock, Texas, June 1989), 34.
2. For a concise history of the Coffey Ranch, see Martha Doty Freeman and Joe C. Freeman, A Cultural Resource Inventory of the Proposed Stacy Reservoir; Concho, Coleman, and Runnels Counties, Texas, vol. II: Historical Cultural Resources, report prepared for the Colorado River Municipal Water District by Espey Huston, and Associates, Inc., Engineering and Environmental consultants (Austin, Texas, March 1981), 3-4 through 11; also Hazie Davis LeFevre, Concho County History 1858-1958 (Eden, Texas, March 1959), 37.
3. Freeman, 4-1; also 4-3 and 4-4.
4. For more information on the Trap Crossing, see Glen Wilson's

essay, "Leaday," published in Coleman County Historical Commission, A History of Coleman County and Its People, vol. I, (San Angelo, Texas: Anchor Publishing Company, 1985), 268-269.

5. Coleman County Courthouse, Deed Record vol. B, 572 and 573, 9 April 1878, Fort Bend School Lands to William H. Day.

6. For a concise history of the early activities of William H. Day, see James Padgitt's essay, "Ranching in Coleman County," published in Coleman County Historical Commission, vol. I, 44-48.

7. Abbe, 14.

8. Freeman, 4-9.

9. Abbe, 14.

10. Freeman, 4-9 through 4-11.

11. Wilson, 268.

12. Coleman County Courthouse, Deed Record vol. 64, 7-11, 1 October 1907, Willie Mabel Day Padgitt to Jo Zach Miller.

13. The town plat drawing was bound into Deed Record vol. 45, 618 and a photocopy is attached to this history.

14. The hotel appears in a photograph of Tom Padgitt in a group of men standing on the porch. The photograph is dated May 1905; it is published in Coleman County Historical Commission, vol. I, 268.

15. Interview with Ralph and May Allen, Leaday, Texas, 14 June 1989; interview by Patrick O'Neill, Mariah Associates, Inc.

16. Coleman County Courthouse, Commissioners' Court Minutes, vol. J, 109-113, 4 June 1917; this is a notice of a school bond election for the purpose of "...constructing and equipping a public free school of wood material...."

17. Wilson, 269.

18. Ralph Allen interview.

19. Wilson, 269.

20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.; also Ralph Allen interview.
22. Wilson, 268.
23. Interview with James Stephenson, Leaday, Texas, 15 June 1989; interview by Patrick O'Neill, Mariah Associates, Inc.
24. Interview with Vivian Cohea Matthews, Coleman, Texas, 12 October 1989; interview by Dan Utley, Texas Historical Commission.
25. Coleman County courthouse, Deed Record vol. 88, 540, February 1916; this is a Commissioners' Court order "to accept revocation canceling portion of Leaday Townsite and returning it to acreage...."
26. Stephenson interview.
27. Ralph Allen interview.
28. Ibid.
29. Stephenson interview.
30. Ibid.
31. Coleman County Courthouse, District Clerk's Office; Commerce State Bank of Kansas City (trustee for Jo Zach Miller IV et. al.), grant of permanent easement to the Colorado River Municipal Water District, 22 December 1986; this is a judgement on condemnation proceedings not yet filed on record.

V. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored by Mariah Associates, Inc., archaeologists; recorded under the direction of Greg Kendrick, HABS regional coordinator, Denver. The project was completed during the summer of 1989 at the project field office at Houston and College Station, Texas. Project supervisor was Graham B. Luhn, A. I. A., architect; project architectural historian was Gus Hamblett, Texas A&M University; intern architects were Debbie Fernandez and Paul Neidinger; student architects were Brian Dougan, Robert Holton, Janna Johnson, Wayne Jones, and Pat Sparks, Texas A&M University; project photographer was Paul Neidinger, photographic processing by Laura McFarlane.

